



**Chicora Foundation, Inc.**  
PO Box 8664, Columbia, SC 29202

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# Monumental Issues

## Preserving African American Cemeteries

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### Special points of interest:

- Charleston, March 31, 1:30-4:30pm, Charleston Co. Public Library, 68 Calhoun St.
- Beaufort, April 7, 1:00-4:00pm, Beaufort Public Library, 311 Scott St.
- Georgetown, April 14, 1:00-4:00pm, Georgetown Co. Public Library, 405 Cleland St.
- WORKSHOPS ARE FREE BUT REQUIRE AN RSVP

African American cemeteries are one of South Carolina's most endangered historic resources. Over the past several years Chicora has been involved in several court battles to preserve and protect these burying grounds.

The foundation's director, Dr. Michael Trinkley, served as an expert witness in a Charleston district court case to protect the Scanlonville Cemetery, created by African American freedmen immediately after the Civil War. Dr. Trinkley also served as an expert witness for the boundaries of the Hart's Bluff Cemetery on Wadmalaw Island.

As a result of these and other legal cases, Chicora has developed a series of workshops that will be held in Charleston, Beaufort, and Georgetown. The workshops are design to help the black community identify and protect their cemeteries. The program will include information on South Carolina laws protecting cemeteries, a comparison of African American and Euro American burial grounds, and effective documentation of cemeteries.

The goal of the workshops is to help ensure that these cemeteries are recognized and preserved. The workshops are free (see the side bar for locations and time), but require preregis-



The inclusion of a plate in the tombstone, once very common in traditional African American cemeteries traces its roots back to African traditions.

tration by contacting Debi Hacker at [hacker@chicora.org](mailto:hacker@chicora.org) or calling 803-787-6910.

## History and People of Randolph Cemetery

Chicora Foundation has completed a historical overview of Randolph Cemetery. The study also examines 75 individuals buried in the cemetery to better understand who was using the cemetery. The report provides a window into the history of

this African American burial ground in Columbia.

For example, while Randolph has typically been identified as a burial place for the politically prominent and even wealthy African American community,

this study found many of the burials were by working class blacks.

This new understanding of the cemetery is available from your local public library or can be purchased from Chicora.

## Voodoo in a Columbia Cemetery



Two sets of two plastic skulls entirely wrapped in black electrical tape were encountered buried in a Columbia churchyard. Here one has been partially opened to reveal the mandible of one skull.

Voodoo is a West African spiritual system of faith and ritual practices. Diaspora spread Voodoo to North and South America and the Caribbean.

From there it made its way into the slave colonies of the South, including South Carolina. It is also known as Vodou, Vodoun, Vudu, or Vudun, as well as Hoodoo.

Books such as *High Sheriff of the Low Country* by J.E. McTeer and more recently

Roger Pinckney's *Blue Roots* remind us that the practice, while perhaps less common today than 50 years ago, is still present.

Charms, often called simply gris gris or mojo bags, are a form of wanga or magic. These are not restricted to voodoo practice, but are also found in European folk magic.

The identification of these two charms in a downtown Colum-

bia cemetery is unusual, but shouldn't be entirely unexpected, given the history of Columbia and its ethnic diversity.

Their meaning is unclear — and like most charms is probably known only by their maker. This is the first time that we have found such items in a Columbia cemetery.

Once identified and recorded, the remains were reburied

## Chicora Conducts Conservation Assessment at Beautiful Machpelah Cemetery



Nicole Southerland prepared to photograph one of the damaged markers at the Lincolnton, NC Machpelah Cemetery.

The Machpelah Cemetery is not only historic, it is postcard perfect — a beautiful white clapboard church and a cemetery surrounded by an extraordinary stone wall.

Fortunately, the cemetery is also deeply loved. Chicora was asked by Mr. Jason Harp with the Lincoln County (NC) Mu-

seum of History to visit the cemetery and conduct a conservation assessment. Jason had identified a benefactor with strong ties to the cemetery who wanted to make certain that the cemetery was preserved.

We visited the churchyard and identified 35 stones requiring treatment. Some are suffering

from extensive sugaring and require consolidation. Others are broken and require repair. There are also several box tombs that need to be partially rebuilt.

We are hoping to begin many of the treatments in this summer.

## Findings at St. Elizabeths



These two cast iron crosses were used to mark Confederate graves at St. Elizabeths until they were apparently discarded during a clean-up at the cemetery. They have been turned over to the GSA with conservation treatment recommendations.

A previous article (November 2006) explained that Chicora had been retained by the GSA to conduct work at the historic St. Elizabeths Cemetery in Washington, DC.

We have completed the inventory of the markers present, conducting a complete tran-

scription, photo documentation, and conservation assessment. We have also evaluated the cemetery and its setting for long-term preservation needs. Additional historical research has also been conducted at the Library of Congress and the National Archives.

One of the most interesting finds was the recovery of one intact and one fragmentary iron marker that had been used in the cemetery to mark Confederate graves. Thought stolen, these markers were apparently just discarded over the fence during a clean-up!